

Addicts' Hunt Pedigree

N. C. Department of Cultural Resources

"Look at me," Ted Bragdon said. "I'm supposed to be on vacation in Raleigh, visiting friends. But — isn't this terrible? — every chance I get, I sneak over here."

Across the table, Mrs. Frank S. Moody nodded. "It's an addiction."

"That's right," Bragdon said. "It's like being a dope addict."

But it wasn't anything like drugs that brought the two together: it was their pedigrees. Both had come long distances — Bragdon from Maine, Mrs. Moody from Alabama — to spend the gray January afternoon in the genealogy section of the N. C. State Library.

There, among the stacks of tax lists, census lists, revolutionary rosters, diaries and deeds, Bragdon had asked Mrs. Moody "Are you by chance related to the Maine Moodys?" and two "addicts" were off on their favorite subject — genealogy.

They are not all that unusual. In 1975, the genealogy section served 12,244 patrons, who used its facilities in person, over the telephone and through the mails. The volume of mail the section receives has doubled in the past two years.

The state even has a genealogical society, organized only a year ago but already boasting more than 700 members, according to one of its directors, Dr. Lenox D. Baker.

Dr. Baker, a retired surgeon, says genealogy takes up as much time as a full time job. "I work at it day and night," he said.

"I spend every spare

moment doing this," Bragdon said. "I have other interests — I ski, I travel. But genealogy is my first love."

Bragdon's search for his family has been unusually successful. In the last two and a half years, he claims to have turned up more than 7,000 Bragdons across the United States, all apparently descended from one man who emigrated to what is now Maine in 1632.

Mrs. Moody — who was tracing her family "only" to the 18th century — was at the North Carolina library with her husband, a Birmingham doctor. They were putting in a few eight-hour days at the genealogy room as a "vacation" before Dr. Moody had to attend a medical meeting at Pinehurst.

"We really enjoy it," Mrs. Moody said. "I've been doing genealogy for the past 10 years. . . . We have an Airstream trailer and once we spent two weeks in the genealogical library in Columbia (S. C.). We were there from morning till night, every day. And it was open evenings and Sundays. It was wonderful."

Why the growing interest in genealogy? Why such a blue-

blooded hobby — and for many people, a profession — in a historically non-aristocratic nation?

"Maybe it's because Americans have such a rootless, mobile society," suggested David Bevan, chief of library information services. "It gives people a sense of security and of belonging to know where their ancestors lived and what they were like."

Lee Albright, head of the genealogy section, thinks people also get involved with genealogy — and stay involved — because it's fun.

"The people you find in the records," she said, "become more real to you than some of the people you see in the elevator every day."

The old records certainly show more personality than the sort of computerized remains we leave our descendants nowadays.

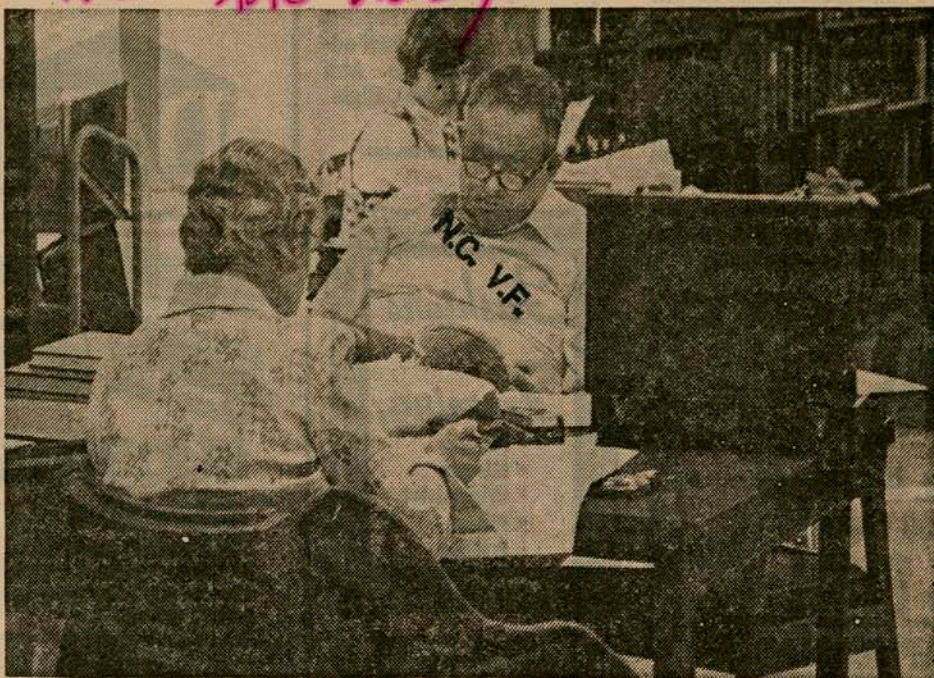
Leafing through a volume entitled "Abstract of the Wills of Edgecombe County, 1733-1856," for example, you find John Flanagin. He may have died in 1793, but it still raises eyebrows today to read that he split all his property between

his wife and his mistress — "provided they live quiet and contented together" in the same house.

People hunting for North Carolina family histories soon work their way out of the genealogy section, for it contains mostly secondary sources: transcribed and published deeds, wills, census records, published archives and so on.

To obtain original documents, or to verify the published pieces in the genealogy room, you must go to the state archives. These are the "real" records — handwritten, yellowing documents from all over the state — stored and guarded in the same downtown Raleigh building that houses the library.

To do any out-of-state research — for example, if your family came to North Carolina from Virginia — you would remain in the genealogy room, for it also contains extensive published material from each of the original 13 colonies as well as some material from at least 20 other states.



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